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# Minorities in Iraq

The issue of minorities in Iraq needs to be viewed in light of the current state of affairs in Iraq. The situation is unbelievably bad for minorities. It is difficult to imagine how much worse things could become, but in reality they could become considerably worse. We also need to face the fact that we in the coalition have seriously ignored and failed to deal with the plight of minorities. Therefore we must accept a considerable amount of responsibility for the present crisis. Whilst we acknowledge that the major issue is with the Mandeans, Yazidees and Christians we must not forget the plight of the minority of minorities: the Jews. In addition to addressing the issue of minorities in Iraq, we must also examine the nature of terrorism in Iraq, as it is the major threat to the various minority groups.

## Christianity in Iraq

Christianity has been present in Iraq from the foundation of the faith. When Thomas stopped off in Nineveh on his way to India, he converted the people in the city of Ninevah to Christianity, and Christians in Iraq have been a strong and persistent community in Iraq since that time. The Church has been through many struggles and difficulties over the years, but none equate to the problems of today.

## Christian Refugees and IDP's

In the period of sanctions many of the Christians left Iraq. Since the war most of the remaining Christians have left Iraq and are now refugees in Jordan and Syria. Many of the Christians are living in unbearable conditions and are destitute with no immediate relief in sight.

In the past few months many Christians have had to leave their places of residence, especially in Dora on the outskirts of Baghdad. In Dora, many people were threatened with

death if they did not convert to Islam or pay large sums in Jezera Tax (Enforced Islamic tax of the Dhimmi). There are now hundreds of Christians living in churches in Baghdad, where the provision of food and water is becoming increasingly difficult.

## Violence Against Christians

All people in Iraq are at risk of violence, but in the past few months Christians have become a specific target. They have become targets of murder, kidnapping and torture. Sadly, there are multiple examples of this. In the past month, thirty-six of my own congregation have been kidnapped. To date, only one has been returned.

## Reasons Given for this Aggression

1. Not Muslim

2. Belong to a Western religion (though it is not true it is often said)

3. Are seen as being close to or even part of the Coalition

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*Coalition and the Christians*

As a coalition, we must accept that we have contributed in a major way to the sufferings and demise of Christians in Iraq. We must accept that we have played a major role in creating the

problem but our contribution to dealing with this huge problem has been minimal. In reality we have done nothing.

## Requirements of Christians

1. Security (provision of safe zone or governates)

2. Food and Water

3. Ability to Worship

## Major Issues Required

1. Provision

2. Engagement (effects of recent Iraqi Inter Religious Congress)

## Conclusion

We are faced with a major crisis. There are countless meetings about this issue in Iraq, and people write reports yet do nothing. Now is the time we need to take action if the religious minorities in the cradle of civilization are to survive.

# Terrorism and its Threat to Minorities

## Introduction

Spending the vast majority of my time with Muslims in conflict areas, I am acutely aware of the issues facing them and the ways in which they are attempting to deal with them. There is a serious lack of understanding of these issues by many Western governments. This is in part due to the lack of willingness to deal with religious issues. The serious problem is that there is a dearth of knowledge and experience within governmental circles to deal with the religious issues.

The whole mechanism of dealing with religious leaders is based on long-term relationships and an awareness of who they are and where they are coming from. Relationships between Islam and the West are the worst they have ever been. There are fundamental problems with the whole concept of a war on the abstract noun of terrorism.

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## Cause of Terrorism

□ The concept of loss is the major contributor to terrorist activity. The concept of loss is exhibited in many situations throughout the Middle East and is an integral component of the issues facing Western governments. The biggest issues are clearly Palestine and Iraq. Other major issues of concern are Afghanistan, Chechnya and the general attitude of the West toward the Islamic World.

*Issues of Loss*

Territory

Influence

Money

Control

Power Ultimately it is the issue of the loss of power that is the major cause of most terrorist activity.

**Examples of Loss**

*Iraqi Sunnis*

The Iraqi Sunnis previously had ultimate power in Iraq. They have lost their uniform control of the government in addition to influence and control. Many Sunnis have lost considerable sums of money in the de-Bathification process. The removal of the previous regime has resulted in a significant loss of power for the Sunni. This is viewed by the Iraqis to be the result of US and British action. Other coalition partners are not taken that seriously. There is, at the moment, more trust in the Americans than the Iraqi Government. The Iraqi government is viewed by the Sunni as a puppet government placed in power by the US. Sunnis perceive the Iraqi

government as having no regard for their community.

*Iraqi Shia*

 The Shia majority perceives that their government is actually exacerbating their experience of loss as a result of the government's reliance on the Americans. This perceived loss is seen by some as the result of American influence.

The result in both of these groups is a move towards a radicalization of their positions in an attempt to regain power or to attack those who are perceived as having power. This is very much the position held by the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al Sadr.

*Palestinians*

 The biggest problem of loss amongst the Palestinians is the loss of territory and the subsequent loss of power and autonomy. The fact that the Palestinian people have been suffering feelings of loss since 1948 adds to the enormity of the crisis.

## International Perception

The perception in much of the Islamic world is that the West, in particular the US and the UK are targeting Islamic nations. The West is also seen as trying to dominate and obliterate Islamic

culture with Western liberalism.

## Islamic Engagement

For too long there has been the lack of engagement with Islamic leaders. What needs to be understood is that Western liberal Muslims are not the ones who need to be engaged. In Islam, there is not a separation between religion and politics and this is a major fundamental difference that needs to be understood by the West. Amongst many of the Islamic religious leaders, there is a developed involvement in terrorist activity. There is also a major dissatisfaction with the OIC and other international Islamic bodies.

(E.g. Amman and the Sunni Leaders)

## The Effects of the War on Terror in the West

-       Major effect on Muslims in the West and increased fear of Muslims
-       Reduced engagement
-       The Language of engaging with moderates (offensive to Muslims)
-       The perception of Muslims as being potentially dangerous
-       The response of young Muslims to help their fellow suffering Muslims

## The Effects of the War on Terror in the Islamic World

-       A major sense of despair amongst many Muslims
-       A move towards greater religious observance
-       An interest in groups causing terrorism
-       An increased aggression towards local Christians
-       A perception that the West or Israel is responsible for all problems

*The Needs*

- Careful use of the terminology of moderates
- Serious engagement with Islamic leadership
- Engagement with religious issues
- Willingness to explore how loss can be addressed
- Engagement of senior political and military leaders with Islamic leaders